

EDUCATION

Police clash with pro-Palestinian protesters, clear encampments on Tucson, Flagstaff campuses

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Published 9:50 a.m. MT May 1, 2024 | Updated 9:57 a.m. MT May 1, 2024

Pro-Palestinian protests on university campuses in Tucson and Flagstaff escalated late Tuesday, spilling over into early Wednesday morning clashes at encampments between demonstrators and police.

Using gas, police cleared an encampment at the University of Arizona that refused to disperse by a 10:30 p.m. deadline, as well as subsequent protests that drew hundreds to the area.

Roughly 250 miles north, dozens of state and local law enforcement officers in riot gear descended on Northern Arizona University about 30 minutes before the 10 p.m. deadline for the encampment to disperse. That led to a more than three-hour-long effort to clear the Flagstaff campus, which included arrests of around 20 people and reports of tear gas being used on protesters.

University of Arizona: Multiple arrests, police use gas

Police and protesters clashed early Wednesday morning on the streets outside the University of Arizona where protesters had built an encampment demanding the university divest from Israel, among other things.

The encampment built Tuesday afternoon featured a dozen canopy tents enclosed in a circle and a makeshift barrier of rope, tables, sheets of metal and wood pallets.

Chrissy Lieberman, the dean of students, gave three warnings to the protesters throughout the evening that they had to disband by 10:30 pm. After the deadline, the encampment was still in place, and police, state troopers and Special Weapons and Tactics officers, or SWAT, began to surround the encampment. For the next three hours, police asked protesters to leave over a dozen times.

By 2 a.m., University of Arizona President Robert Robbins ordered police to “immediately enforce campus use policies and all corresponding laws without further warning,” in a statement after protests spilled from the university campus onto the adjacent street.

Police dressed in riot gear lined up on Park Avenue and advanced toward the protesters who were linked arm-in-arm. Police pulled out several people and arrested them, pushing the protest north. People in the crowd were screaming and chanting.

By 3:30 a.m. the encampment and protests were cleared.

Northern Arizona University: More than a dozen arrested in Flagstaff

A few dozen protesters remained in the encampment past the 10 p.m. curfew, almost all of whom were eventually detained and forcibly removed. Countless others lined the perimeter of the lawn outside the school's student union.

By the time police arrived on campus, hundreds of people had gathered around the area, many of whom arrived hours early anticipating an eventual confrontation with police. Balconies of nearby dorms and the parking garage that overlooks the lawn that housed the encampment were filled with spectators throughout the night.

Law enforcement spent nearly three hours clearing the area on campus. They steadily pushed back the crowd and spread them in opposite directions but a large number of protesters continued to stand their ground in front of the police lines.

Just after 1 a.m., the few remaining police officers retreated to their vehicles and left campus to cheers from the close to 100 protesters who still remained.

The Students for Justice in Palestine chapter on campus organized the encampment. The group sent the school administration a list of demands ahead of the protest which included

revealing the school's lobbying activities, divesting and cutting all ties with Israel and abolishing the on-campus police force.

Ahead of the protest, Northern Arizona University President José Luis Cruz-Rivera released a statement to the school community expressing support for the right to free speech and free expression but also outlined the school's interim policy prohibiting expressive activity and temporary structures outside of the campus operating hours.

Hadi Hassani, a senior and protest organizer, said that after reading the letter, they expected a confrontation with law enforcement once it passed curfew.

"This is exactly what we knew was going to happen," Hassani said.

After more than a dozen arrests, reports of tear gas being used and a continued police presence around protesters, Hassani challenged Cruz-Rivera's true level of support for students' rights to peaceful demonstration.

"This is not supporting at all," Hassani said.

Hassani said they will regroup and are prepared to return on Wednesday, and every day after that until their demands are met.

The group will also be holding a news conference at 11 a.m. Wednesday at the encampment site.

Reach the reporters at sarah.lapidus@gannett.com and LLatch@gannett.com.

The Republic's coverage of southern and northern Arizona is funded, in part, with a grant from Report for America. Support Arizona news coverage with a tax-deductible donation at supportjournalism.azcentral.com.